

# HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL

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Did you know...

...the Hawaiian name for the Hawaiian monk seal means "the dog that runs in the rough sea."



Photo courtesy Lori Mazzuca ©1997

## Population trends

Hawaiian monk seals are the most endangered seal species in the U.S., with only an estimated 1,300- 1,400 seals remaining.

Pup production is highly variable but, on average, 200 Hawaiian monk seal pups are born annually.

Of the three known species of monk seals, only two still exist -- the Hawaiian and the Mediterranean. The Caribbean monk seal was last sighted in 1952, and is believed to be extinct.

## Distribution & Movement Patterns

Breeding populations are at six major locations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands; a relatively small number of seals live in the waters off the main Hawaiian Islands.

Sandy beaches and lava benches are preferred "haul out" sites for monk seals.

Monk seals commonly remain at their birth island for life.

## Feeding patterns

Prey includes bottom and reef fish, eels, octopus, squid and crustaceans.

Most feeding occurs at depths less than 75 to 90m (although the deepest recorded dive was greater than 500m).

*Hawaiian monk seals are a critically endangered species protected under the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Hawai'i state law.*

*Report any suspected violations of these laws to the NOAA Enforcement Hotline at (800) 853-1964.*

*Hawaiian monk seals usually haul out on beaches alone or in small groups. If you see a monk seal on a beach, do not disturb it, but DO call NOAA Fisheries to report the sighting -- (808) 973-2935 or (808)983-5715.*

*Remember, monk seals need to rest during the day to conserve energy for hunting and diving at night. Please keep dogs away from seals to avoid bites and disease transmission.*

## Natural History

The maximum age of the Hawaiian monk seal is believed to be 25-30 years. Females reach sexual maturity at 5-10 years of age. Roughly 65% of all female adults give birth each year. Most females give birth on beaches with adjoining shallow water areas. Pups are weaned at 5-6 weeks of age; mothers do not eat while lactating. Pups measure about 3 feet at birth and weigh about 30 pounds; their weight may increase to as much as 150 to 200 pounds before weaning. Mating occurs in the water, and is rarely observed by humans.

## Threats

Entanglement in marine debris.  
Disturbance by humans can cause seals to abandon important habitat.  
Aggression by adult male seals can injure or kill adult females or juveniles, usually at areas with larger numbers of adult males.  
Predation by sharks.  
Interactions with dogs (attacks and disease transmission).  
Limited prey resources.

## Recovery efforts

Marine debris has been removed from island beaches, reefs, and entangled seals.  
Adult males have been translocated to balance sex ratios and decrease the incidence of male aggression.  
Rehabilitation and release of underweight pups.  
Development of recovery plan and a Monk Seal Recovery Team.

## Research

Assess and monitor population size  
Determine reproduction and survival rates  
Identify causes of injuries and mortalities  
Monitor social behaviors, including pup rearing and mobbing behavior  
Characterize foraging behaviors, including diving patterns and prey selection  
Census efforts at important habitat sites  
The decline of seals at French Frigate Shoals  
Assess role of health and disease in population trends

## For more information

Call NOAA Fisheries Species Management Program, 808-973-2937, or the Sanctuary headquarters below. For viewing marine mammals in the wild, visit the NOAA Fisheries website:

[www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/MMWatch/MMViewing.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/MMWatch/MMViewing.html)

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**HAWAIIAN ISLANDS HUMPBACK WHALE  
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